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**Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force
Research Product Two:
The Role of Community Infrastructure
in Building Strong Neighbourhoods**

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**Submitted
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SECTION 1: Defining Community Infrastructure and Its Structural Components

Defining Community Infrastructure

Community infrastructure is defined as a complex system of facilities, programs, and social networks that aims to improve people's quality of life (United Way of Greater Toronto, 2004). These services, networks and physical assets work in tandem to form the foundation of a strong neighbourhood. The contrast between a community with "strong" infrastructure and one with "weak" infrastructure is clearly outlined in Clutterbuck and Novick's (2003) *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies*. The authors note that, "municipalities developing 'strong' infrastructure will integrate physical and social planning and development and will invest adequately in both". In contrast, 'weak' infrastructure "will indicate a continuing separation of the physical and social requirements of the city." Thus, for a strong infrastructure to exist in a locality it is critical that there is adequate investment in both physical and social types of infrastructure.

Throughout the literature, the term social infrastructure and community infrastructure appear to be used interchangeably. In reviewing social planning activities in the City of Toronto, Zizys et al. (2004) highlight the integrative functions of social infrastructure that help to create a sense of place in neighbourhoods. The authors characterize social infrastructure as "those institutions which are the building blocks of civil society, the places where the community sector functions (community centres, meeting places), where there is support for organizations to form and grow and where social capital gets created."

The community infrastructure of a neighbourhood can be provided within the neighbourhood (internal infrastructure) or provided to the neighbourhood by a source that is located or operates from outside of the neighbourhood (external infrastructure). The types of organizations and institutions that make up this infrastructure range from issue-based organizations which focus broadly on specific issues such as youth rights; neighbourhood membership-based organizations such as residents' and tenants' associations; direct service organizations that support human development such as health clinics, child care programs and multi-services centres; faith and spiritual organizations and/or religious congregations that provide community space and may provide services; and public common places that offer opportunities for adults and youth to enjoy social and recreational activities. Also included are local businesses and other local institutions that have an intimate stake in the well-being of the neighbourhood in which they are located (Roman et al. 2004).

Categorizing Community Infrastructure: Six Clusters

The quality of neighbourhood life is influenced by three significant factors: the community services offered within the community, the social relations among residents and other participants in the community and the physical environment of the community. This section of the report focuses specifically on the continuum of services that work to improve the quality of life of community

members, how these services interact with each other, and the impact they have on both social relations and the physical environment within the communities they serve.

Researchers in various disciplines studying the regeneration of cities and the factors associated with neighbourhood well-being identify a similar range of services, facilities and networks that are part of “comeback cities” and neighbourhoods that have reduced poverty and overcome adversity. However, these services, facilities and networks may be categorized differently (Roman and Moore 2004, Grogan and Proscio 2000, Howarth 2003). Toronto has a broad range of community services that are similar to that described in the literature. These community services work inter-dependently within communities and across communities and are provided by a mixture of community organizations, faith groups and various levels of government. This report classifies community infrastructure into a six-pronged typology that emphasizes how they seek to contribute to the quality of life in their community, as follows: (1) Quality of physical life; (2) Human development; (3) Services designated for specific populations; (4) Rights and advocacy; (5) Local economy; and (6) Physical environment.

Cluster One – Quality of Physical Life

The quality of physical life cluster is comprised of organizations and institutions that secure basic health, emergency, housing and sustainability in each neighbourhood. An essential part of the social fabric that builds strong neighbourhoods is an effective and coordinated system of health services, emergency services and housing services. Examples of these types of services include:

1. Community-based health services (incl. community health and mental health)
2. Public health services
3. Emergency and crisis services (incl. food banks, fire and emergency medical services)
4. Social, affordable and emergency housing (incl. shelters and support to homeless people)

Cluster Two – Human Development

Neighbourhoods provide public common spaces in which human development is nurtured. For the very young, seniors and people with disabilities, the neighbourhood is often the primary public common space in their lives. This cluster includes services that combine a broad mix of public, private and community organizations working with families and individuals with the goal of strengthening the future as well as present assets of the community. Examples of these types of services include:

1. Settlement services for immigrants and refugees
2. Child and family services (including child care, family resource centres)
3. Recreation and wellness services
4. Community arts and cultural organizations
5. Public schools (K-12)
6. Public libraries
7. Post-secondary education (including colleges, universities, apprenticeship institutions)
8. Adult education, training and employment services (including English as a Second Language)

Cluster Three – Cross-Community Support Services

The cross-community support services cluster includes services that are provided to specific populations within neighbourhoods. Often these services are provided by organizations serving a

broad constituency that spans many neighbourhoods. For example, the YWCA, a city-wide agency, provides services for women in many parts of the city. Examples of such services include those designed for:

1. Women
2. Youth
3. Lesbian/Gay/Bi-sexual/Trans-gendered people (including parents and families)
4. People with disabilities
5. Seniors
6. Urban Aboriginal Peoples
7. Immigrants and refugees
8. Ethno-cultural and ethno-racial groups

Cluster Four– Rights and Advocacy

Social relations among community members are complex and often reflect many dimensions of inequality. As a response to conditions of inequality, some organizations may see the need to expand their direct services beyond their neighbourhoods and beyond their core services to promote systemic change through civic engagement and advocacy efforts. Multi-service agencies work with a wide range of constituents and often provide leadership and support to networks and coalitions. Examples of such organizations/groups include:

1. Consumer/Environmental protection agencies
2. Networks, coalitions and advocacy groups (may have a local and/or issue focus)
3. Civic engagement organizations (including school councils, social planning councils, neighbourhood associations)
4. Legal services (including legal aid clinics, tenant associations)
5. Multi-service agencies.

Cluster Five – Neighbourhood Economy

The fifth cluster of social infrastructure includes the small businesses and labour organizations that have an intricate link to the neighbourhood economy. Key players are organizations that promote the quality of work environments within their neighbourhoods and public and non-profit organizations that seek to provide a safety net for those members of the community that fall between the cracks in the labour market. Examples of such organizations include:

1. Business Improvement Associations/Better Business Bureaus
2. Small businesses and cooperative associations
3. Labour groups (including local unions)
4. Asset-building strategies (Individual Development Accounts, community economic development and social economy initiatives)

Cluster Six – Physical Environment

For neighbourhoods to prosper they must be seen as safe places that are aesthetically pleasing and encourage social interaction among residents and stakeholders within the community. The physical environment cluster includes the services and institutions that promote harmonious social relations in neighbourhoods. Examples of these types of institutions include:

1. Parks and public spaces
2. Initiatives to ensure accessibility (including design features and services)
3. Mobility services (including Wheel Trans) and public transportation
4. Community safety (Crime Stoppers, community policing, safety audits)
5. Neighbourhood Revitalization Projects

Foundation community services

It is our contention that foundation community services are the essential building blocks in all neighbourhoods which ensure that community infrastructure thrives. Additional services and facilities will be needed to meet the demographic and local needs of the neighbourhood. The foundation community services that need to be delivered at the neighbourhood level are publicly-funded schools, libraries and community or neighbourhood centres. These foundation community services are ideally housed in well-designed facilities that provide a community anchor or focal point. As foundation services, they adopt a holistic view of the community and anticipate, monitor and respond to community needs over time. These community anchors also provide a physical meeting place/space in which some additional services are delivered and there is space for community meetings and events which foster social relations, community cohesion and civic engagement.

The pattern in existing and emerging Toronto neighbourhoods suggests that the school, the community/neighbourhood centre and the library currently fill this role of community anchor in many parts of Toronto. It is important to note that in a recent, city-wide series of town hall-style consultations, participants identified that schools, libraries and community centres enhance the quality of their life (Listening to Toronto Session, Jan., 2004). [0] In designing and (re)developing new neighbourhoods such as Regent Park, urban planners now regularly consider the need for foundation community services such as schools, community centres and libraries as well as other specialized services and facilities (Neumann et. al. 2004).

There are other types of community infrastructure that must be available but not necessarily in every neighbourhood nor in every city. Some services may best be delivered in clusters of neighbourhoods throughout the city. For example, in the Greater Toronto Area which receives almost half (43%) of newcomers to Canada each year (City of Toronto 2002), settlement services for immigrants and refugees are essential community services and must be available in neighbourhoods where there are large populations of recent immigrants. It is important to stress that foundation community services need to include a monitoring/planning function which meaningfully involves residents in determining the type and nature of services and in ensuring that the necessary services are delivered at the neighbourhood level. This process/function needs to take into account the life-cycle of neighbourhoods that will result in changing needs over time (City of Toronto 1991).

SECTION 2: The Role of Community Infrastructure

Effective community infrastructure organizations help neighbourhoods and individuals build assets for long-term success. Investments in basic needs, education, libraries, employment, affordable

housing, recreation and social inclusion are the building blocks of vibrant and strong neighbourhoods that supplement the physical design of buildings and roads.

Community infrastructure needs the active involvement of the people residing in the neighbourhoods. In other words, effective community infrastructure must be in partnership with neighbourhood residents who seek to transform and improve the areas that they call home. There is some interesting evidence that the existence of community infrastructure makes a difference – that is, community infrastructure matters to neighbourhood well-being and social capital. For example, the number of “pro-social” places (schools, recreation centres, parks and libraries) is positively related to the level of resident participation in organizations. That is, neighbourhoods with more pro-social places have higher levels of participation in informal networks such as block groups, youth groups, parent-teacher associations, which increase the opportunities to develop shared values about the neighbourhood and its needs. Researchers also found that the number of pro-social places is positively related to residents’ satisfaction with the block on which they live. (Roman et. al. 2004)

Basic Needs

Addressing issues of basic needs is fundamental in any community regeneration plan. The community infrastructure must be present to ensure that people have easy access to food, income supports and housing. For most individuals and families, secure housing is necessary to enable them to connect to other types of community infrastructure. Clearly, income security is related to the ability to find and keep secure housing. Meeting these basic needs is a precursor to strengthening social networks which are important qualitative contributions to neighbourhood vitality. In other words, if people do not have secure housing or income, they are not likely to have time or resources to contribute to social networks.

Education and libraries

As noted in the City of Toronto, *Social Development Strategy* (2001), “The use of Toronto’s schools provides a model of how sectors can work together. Schools are not only centres for learning but also have become the homes to child care centres, family resources services and nutrition programs.”

In addition to schools, the public libraries serve as an invaluable community resource and public meeting place. Public libraries provide social benefits such as reading programs, arts and cultural activities, and affordable public meeting places, and access to the internet at no fee. At the same time, there are economic benefits of public libraries to users, businesses, services and Canadian culture (City of Toronto 2001). They include:

- Provision of information in a timely and cost effective manner
- Support of the local economy through contribution to local businesses resulting in improvement of market worth and economic success of communities
- Support of the cultural industry sector such as the book trade and other related industries.

Early Childhood Education and Care

There is strong evidence that investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services has long term benefits for children and for society as a whole. Generally, ECEC is delivered at a neighbourhood level. Ideally, these services are located within walking distance from young families. An econometric cost benefit analysis of early childhood education studied the impact of ECEC services on children's school performance, on mothers' rate of employment over time, on family income and other factors (Cleveland and Krashinsky 1998). The study also analyzed the cost and benefits of providing publicly-funded, universally accessible ECEC to all children 2-5 years in Canada. This analysis concludes that for every dollar invested in high quality ECEC there is a two dollar benefit to children, parents and society. This econometric analysis shows that regardless of socio-economic background or mothers' employment status, children who participate in early childhood education perform significantly better in school than those who do not participate.

City of Toronto data also point to the value of high quality ECEC services. During 1998-99, the City tracked the 4,736 low and modest income families who received child care subsidies. Of these, almost 70% were led by lone parents. The study shows that a total of 96% of families receiving child care subsidies did not have to rely on social assistance at all. And significantly, almost 53% of the 2,891 families who started as social assistance recipients, left social assistance during the year. The availability of the child care subsidy as well as other factors influenced the reduced reliance on social assistance (Toronto Children and Youth Action Committee 2002).

It is clear that the availability of accessible ECEC services in neighbourhoods makes a difference to the resiliency of families and to their ability to achieve and sustain economic independence.

Creating Employment Opportunities

The Empowerment Zone model developed in the United States is a strategy to re-invest in struggling inner-city neighbourhoods. Primarily focusing on economic development, this model provides incentives for community members to start small businesses in their neighbourhoods and also provides incentives to attract employment opportunities within designated areas. This approach can bring some needed economic resources to stigmatized and struggling neighbourhoods. A focus on quality jobs is also important as a vast number of new jobs created in the 1990s and the early part of this decade have been "part-time, contract, seasonal or own-account self-employment jobs" that are not secure and provide no benefits to their employees (FSA and CSPC-T 2004).

To build strong neighbourhoods it is vital to bring together various actors in each neighbourhood to ensure that a holistic solution for prosperity is put in place. Bradford (2003) notes that, "in each of these places, local actors are searching for, and experimenting with, holistic development models that aim to grow local assets – ranging from business clusters and workforce skills, to inclusive neighbourhoods with well-preserved built and natural environments. In all cases, the broad dynamic of innovation was the same, combining bottom-up strategies with top-down support from higher levels of government." Thus, while the strategies are derived from the communities in which we are hoping to rebuild, senior levels of government need to take a lead in providing resources to support these initiatives.

Recreation

Arts, music, sports and recreation are all important and vital parts of strong neighbourhoods. These activities foster community solidarity, strengthen social networks, healthy lifestyles and also contribute to economic growth in entertainment and tourism. The quality of life in urban neighbourhoods is a critical factor for cities seeking to attract businesses and skilled labour with a view to being globally competitive. (Florida et.al. 2002) Studies have shown that services such as parks, recreation, and cultural activities that enhance the quality of urban life are among the key features that attract the skilled workers to particular places.

Other studies identify eight key benefits of neighbourhood recreation activities (Canadian Parks & Recreation Association.1997):

1. Recreation and active living are essential to personal health and a key determinant of health status
2. Recreation is a key to balanced human development – helping Canadians reach for their potential
3. Recreation and parks are essential to quality of life
4. Recreation reduces self-destructive and anti-social behaviour
5. Recreation and parks build strong families and healthy communities
6. Pay now or pay more Later! Recreation helps to reduce health care, social service, and police/justice costs
7. Recreation and parks are significant economic generators in communities
8. Parks, open spaces and natural areas are essential to ecological survival

Increasingly, our understanding of social structures points to support for recreation, parks and public spaces as an effective means to build the social networks among neighbours.

Research also shows that investment in recreation, particularly for youth, increases self-esteem, improves academic performance, improves health and lowers crime rates. There is also strong evidence that recreation “pays for itself” by reducing the use of social and health services such as child psychiatrists, social workers and probation officers (Browne et. al. 2001. Haldane. 2000).

SECTION 3: Three Case Studies in Toronto

To broaden our perspective on the role of community infrastructure in strengthening neighbourhoods, we identified three community organizations that have played an important role in the evolution of the community services sector in Toronto: Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre (DPNC), Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA) and Tropicana Community Services (TCS). These were selected in order to reflect some of the range of issues and challenges that this sector faces. DPNC has built on its core mission of community development as a key strategy to strengthen its west-end central city catchment area and has benefited from the stability of its community health centre. FSA is a city-wide agency serving families and communities that has developed innovative strategies to meet the needs of specific populations while also moving toward a de-centralized model of service with locations in North York and Scarborough. TCS has broadened its original mandate to serve people, especially youth, from the Caribbean to include the broader black community, all youth and newcomers in Scarborough.

The executive directors of each organization were interviewed and background materials including annual reports, financial statements and program evaluations were reviewed.

Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre

For nearly 20 years, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre (DPNC) has established new programs and services through investigation of emerging community needs and development of innovative responses. Serving a catchment area spanning several neighbourhoods, including approximately 60,000 people most of whom have come to Canada within the past 30 years, the Davenport-Perth neighbourhood is in many ways an invisible community that has not attracted significant media attention, neither positive nor negative. It is rarely identified as a “high risk” area. Nestled in the west end, the DPNC community is bounded by St. Clair West on the North, Ossington and Alberta avenues to the East, Bloor Street to the South, and CN/CP tracks (Keele and Old Weston Road) to the West. The rate of poverty (25.7%) is higher in this area and higher than the City-wide average despite the fact that poverty in the former City of Toronto is not rising as fast as it is in the suburbs.

Community Health Centre fosters holistic programming and sustainability

DPNC is exceptional in that it is both a neighbourhood centre and a community health centre (CHC). The neighbourhood centre is a non-profit multi-service organization that is very much a community anchor that fosters social participation and promotes awareness and active celebration of people’s diversities through programs such as Arts for All, a multi-year project involving residents and artists in dramatic productions and University in the Community which offers university level liberal arts courses to adults who would not normally consider attending university. DPNC strives to ensure that all community members, especially the most vulnerable, have access to adequate income, education and the network of social relationships that enable civic participation and assist community members to help each other and together address shared concerns. The CHC operates with a multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurse practitioners, dieticians, health promoters and counsellors to provide primary health and social support services.

DPNC is home to a range of services including:

- Early childhood development and parenting programs;
- Skills development and social support programs for children, youth, isolated adults and seniors
- Settlement, adult literacy, and employment services;
- A tenant support and eviction prevention program;
- Community dining, community arts and volunteer programs; and
- A Community Health Centre

DPNC adapts to community needs over time

The community development model which engages staff; board members who are also service-users; and community partners, has kept DPNC in touch with emerging needs and facilitated innovative responses to those needs. For example, the Youth Program was developed in response to community concern about an increase in youth gang activity and the Employment Resource Centre was established following a strategic planning process that identified unemployment as a community priority.

The stability of the provincially-funded community health centre (CHC) has provided key support to the infrastructure of DPNC and enabled it to provide a wide range of preventive and primary care health services that have improved the well-being of community residents. As an example, DPNC has developed skills and services to work with people with no formal legal status in Canada who may have lived in Canada for years. These needs were first identified by clinical staff at the community health centre when, at one point, nearly half of health-centre users had no status.

DPNC firmly contends that the community infrastructure needs to be recognized as an essential service. If this recognition is explicit, then resources would be more predictable, as they are for roads and sewers, for example, than they are now. With predictability and stability, DPNC would be able to dedicate some resources to identify emerging community needs at an early stage.

Family Service Association of Toronto

Family Service Association (FSA) celebrates 90 years of service to Toronto. FSA delivers a wide range of programs to help achieve its mission of “strengthened families and individuals in just and supportive communities.” With a mandate to serve vulnerable people across the City, FSA has intentionally moved to focus service in three main locations (Scarborough, North York and central Toronto) across the City in addition to co-locating staff with other service providers in neighbourhoods across the city including Rexdale, Lakeshore and Flemingdon Park. In responding to the changing demographic in Toronto, FSA has broadened its language capacity to provide services, now more than 20 languages. In the 90s, its work has become more specialized; for example, generic counselling has broadened to include additional, more specific services to the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gendered population. In the area of services to those with intellectual disabilities, FSA has pioneered a community development model which works to empower disabled individuals to make choices and determine his/her life direction using the resources of individualized funding and circles of support in the community. In partnership with two neighbourhood centres, St. Christopher House and St. Stephen’s Community House, and the Y.W.C.A., FSA is the Toronto administrative lead of Learn\$ave, a national research and demonstration project led by Social Enterprise Development Initiatives in Toronto. Learn\$ave provides matched savings accounts to eligible low income working people to build their personal assets by getting training or starting a small business.

FSA responds to changing community needs over time

Key factors that have enabled FSA to adapt to changing needs over time include a tradition of strong staff at all levels and a pattern of consistent staff and board leadership. Its scale as a large organization allows some capacity for innovation and risk-taking. The unique structure of FSA’s Employee Assistance Program which generates earned income is a significant factor in the agency’s sustainability.

FSA has consistently worked to adapt its services to meet the changing needs of Toronto’s families. In the past 15 years, FSA has diligently worked with the ethno-cultural, ethno-racial groups in Toronto to adapt its services to meet emerging needs. In its counselling, family violence program for both women and men, services for intellectually disabled, and support for seniors and caregivers, FSA wrestled with the need for change and has made important progress. For example, the Portuguese Inclusion Project resulted in increased participation in community programs and

employment of young adults with intellectual disabilities. Working with the Iranian community, FSA is developing a model to support Iranian families going through separation and divorce. At the same time, FSA has maintained strong commitment to press for systemic change through its decade-long leadership and support to Campaign 2000, a cross-Canada coalition aiming to raise awareness and influence decision-making on child and family poverty. A key decision in the mid 90s led to the creation of the Community Action Team that leads the agency's community development work in partnership with newcomer communities.

Tropicana Community Services

Founded in 1980 to serve disadvantaged youth and their families from the Caribbean, Tropicana Community Services (TCS) now serves a catchment area bounded by Yonge Street on the West, Steeles on the North, Lake Ontario on the South and extends to the City boundary on the East. As community needs changed and fewer Caribbean immigrants came to Toronto, TCS broadened its mandate to include all youth and newcomers. Increasingly, newcomers from continental Africa and South Asia are coming to TCS which maintains its original mission to provide culturally appropriate social services which help to build a healthier community. In the past five years, TCS is working with more Canadian-born children of immigrant parents.

Currently TCS provides counselling to victims of domestic violence, settlement services, youth programs including the Scarborough Youth Resource Centre, a one-stop shop for youth issues, and the Alternative Youth Centre for Employment. TCS operates from five locations in Scarborough office and also provides additional programming in schools. An extensive tutoring program run by volunteers is complemented by summer camp and arts programs. Children of Tomorrow Child Care Centres offer infants through school age children an enriching and educational environment. As *Poverty by Postal Code* identified, Scarborough includes five of the 23 neighbourhoods with very high poverty rates, including Oakridge with a poverty rate of 57.8% and Morningside with more than 50%. Importantly, children and youth are overrepresented in the neighbourhoods with higher poverty rates as are immigrant and visible minority families.

TCS responds to community needs over time

TCS points to United Way support and their own philosophy of cultural appropriateness as key factors that enabled the organization to sustain and adapt over time. United Way membership has provided some necessary flexibility in funding that enables TCS to respond to the emerging needs of youth and to develop educational programs that do not fit into other rigid funding categories.

TCS's philosophy of cultural appropriateness is central to its mission as an ethno-specific agency. As TCS's Executive Director Sharon Shelton explained, the staff group reflects the diversity of service users and thus are highly attuned to the issues of their clients. They can draw on their lived experiences and provide service in a variety of languages and dialects. Recently, responding to the spate of youth violence in several neighbourhoods where many black communities are located, TCS initiated ART – Aggression Replacement Training. ART is a U.S. program that TCS adapted for Canada. ART uses a three-pronged approach to teach strategies to avoid confrontation – Skills Streaming, Anger Control and Moral Reasoning. Initial results indicate that participants have successfully used these new skills to successfully avoid confrontation and violence, particularly in

encounters with the family courts. TCS is seeking resources to complete a formal evaluation of ART which will identify the impact of the program in a more formal way.

Summary of lessons learned

Learnings from the experience of three selected community infrastructure organizations are instructive. Each organization has successfully served clusters of neighbourhoods over time, adjusting to changing needs and seeking to build community leadership. Indeed, there is some sense that a successful community infrastructure organization needs a sufficiently large critical mass to adapt to changing needs of neighbourhoods and to survive through changes in funding and service patterns. DPNC, for example, is a front line agency that often learns about new community needs from users of its community health centre. Over time, it has used this knowledge of the community to tailor programs to the needs of seniors who are isolated, people without status and unemployed youth. TCS, through its summer camp and after school programs, learned of the need for academic help for many children in its area. TCS developed a tutoring program that now is run by 300 volunteers who each donate 60 hours per school term assisting children to improve their academic skills. Anecdotal evidence from parents and teachers indicates that the tutoring program is having a positive impact. TPS would like to conduct a more formal evaluation in conjunction with the schools but lacks the resources.

Community infrastructure organizations also face several challenges with regard to engaging community members in issues that affect them. There is firm agreement that community development work which seeks to enhance civic participation, develop and sustain social cohesion and may also pursue advocacy toward systemic change, is critically important. The process of involving community members provides critical hands-on learning about civil society such as how boards of directors operate, the importance of volunteerism in building social networks, how school councils work and the procedures of local government. These concrete experiences assist newcomers and marginalized groups to understand the dynamics of how to work together to solve a local problem or develop a strategy to meet their own needs. Community engagement also helps to build community leadership. For many immigrants, the opportunity for involvement in community infrastructure is new and requires explanation and outreach. The experience of DPNC and FSA in particular tells us that these initiatives require long-term commitment and support which can be difficult to sustain. Demonstrating impact is also a challenge. Organizations committed to engaging community members must use a variety of creative strategies to support staff and volunteers to continue this work. At the same time, engaging the community often requires outreach and supports to community members such as assistance with child care and transportation.

SECTION 4: Community Infrastructure and Strong Neighbourhoods -- Examples of Success

In the City's Social Development Strategy, the municipal government committed to an investment in social infrastructure. The document notes that, "social infrastructure must be understood to include the whole system of government and community resources, programs, facilities and social networks that contribute to people's health, safety and well-being." (City of Toronto 2001) Many

examples of how community infrastructure plays a role in developing strong neighbourhoods are found in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Canada.

United States

The United States has several programs that support the revitalization of neighbourhoods. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), first approved in 1974, supports a range of activities including housing rehabilitation and preservation, neighbourhood development and community services facilities such as child care centres, seniors' services, youth programs and legal aid services. Qualified local governments are eligible for annual allocations based on a needs-based formula. Within broad federal guidelines, local government sets priorities and works with the community in partnership to plan and implement the programs that benefit low and modest income people. While the bulk of the funding is directed toward housing initiatives, the program has served as a catalyst to develop community infrastructure. The example of Fort Worth, Texas is instructive. Until the late 1990s, Fort Worth had spent most of its CDBG on housing-related activities. Shortly thereafter, Fort Worth changed its focus to develop programs "that make a difference." Concerned about a high incidence of youth crime during the afternoon hours of 3:00-6:00, the Fort Worth mayor directed CDBG funds toward 13 wide-ranging youth centers that provide alternative after-school activities for youth who would otherwise go home to empty houses. Early evidence shows some success in reduction of crime and positive feedback from the community regarding the after-school programs (Doaks et. al. 1999). It is expected that the city will establish these initiatives as permanent crime reduction programs and assume the financing of them from general funds.

In 1993, the United States introduced the Federal Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community program intended to revitalize the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. This program offers \$100M in annual funding to each community that is designated an "Empowerment Zone" along with a 20% tax-break for companies and businesses that choose to operate and relocate to the designated empowerment neighbourhoods. The designed target of the program, in part, is the redevelopment and economic revitalization of America's inner cities (Mayer and Nora, 2004). Six cities (Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, New York and Philadelphia/Camden) were awarded Empowerment Zone designations. Qualifying businesses operating in Empowerment Zones are eligible for three different types of federal tax incentives including one for businesses that hire employees residing within the Empowerment Zone. While, there are differing results in terms of the employment and economic opportunities offered under these zones, there is a vast literature criticizing the EZ/EC's failure to develop long-term and sustainable social infrastructure. Baum (1999) describes an example of such a case in his analysis of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone and the efforts of community organizers to respond and contribute to the revitalization of education in the inner city neighbourhoods.

The Harlem Children's Zone

The Harlem Children's Zone is an exceptional example of a non-profit community organization that leads an intense, focused effort to build strong neighbourhoods. The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) works on the notion that, "it is difficult, often impossible, to raise healthy children in a disintegrated community. Without local institutions that draw families and young people together around common interests and activities — religious, social, and recreational organizations, effective

schools, safe and well- used public spaces — even the most heroic child-rearing is likely to fail” (HCZ 2003, p.i). HCZ operates in 18 locations; its core educational, recreation and social services are the basis for other programs.

The organization has designated 24 blocks in Central Harlem to build healthy neighbourhoods that are a place for children to gain the skills necessary to succeed. Harlem Children’s Zone has worked successfully to increase the focus of its programs on HCZ residents. Using strategies such as door-to-door canvassing and targeted outreach, HCZ has consistently exceeded the penetration rate goals it set for FY 2003.

The Program relies on 5 main “imperatives” (HCZ, 2003):

1. Penetrating the Zone – the Harlem Children’s Zone programs are used by nearly 88% of all youth in the HCZ
2. Tracking Performance – the HCZ designed a three-year evaluation mechanism to ensure effectiveness of the programs
3. Building the Organization – involves ensuring that a diversity of programs are woven together and work together to provide opportunities that support child development in all aspects of life
3. Informing the Field – HCZ understands that it cannot work alone and is active in reporting successes and challenges to its partners in Harlem and across the United States and internationally.
4. Expanding the boundaries – the HCZ started with 24 blocks and will be expanding to 60 blocks in the next few years and it is hoped to 100 blocks by the end of the decade.

The Evaluation Overview identifies some key accomplishments:

- 73% of children 0-2 years in the neighbourhood or zone have attended Baby College
- After participation in Baby College, significantly more parents had obtained health insurance for their children, had read to their children and had improved the safety of their homes
- Students in the universal pre-kindergarten program made dramatic gains; for example, the proportion of children at or above age level in conceptual development nearly doubled from pre-test to post-test (29% to 53%)
- HCZ students have taken and passed Regents Exams (administered at high school) at higher rates than city averages
- Tenants associations were organized in 55 city-owned buildings
- 18 block associations were organized
- A faith-based network of 16 churches was organized
- More than 50 corporate volunteer projects contributed to physical environment changes (HCZ 2003)

United Kingdom

The Blair government launched a new agenda in 1997 which aimed to break the cycle of disadvantage and social inequality. This agenda included broad social policies and more focused programs such as the “New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal” announced in 2001. (Social

Exclusion Unit 2001). The goal of the program is that within 10 to 20 years, no one in the UK should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. The aim of this program is to: (1) deliver economic prosperity; (2) safe communities; (3) high quality education; (4) decent housing; and (5) better health to the poorest parts of the country. At the national level, the Action Plan is implemented by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) which is part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Social Exclusion Unit 2004). This plan focuses on Local Strategic Partnerships and building communities through the participation of the people affected by the policies.

The U.K. approach is quite distinct from trends in either the U.S. or Canada in that the U.K. has adopted a multi-pronged strategy with major initiatives to tackle unemployment and poverty; promote equal opportunities for all; support communities, particularly in deprived areas; reintegrate marginalized, people including the homeless, who have experienced extreme forms of social exclusion; and improve access to advice and services. To date, important progress has been made. In addition to reducing poverty among children and seniors, there are now 1.85 million more people who are working than in 1997. The number of homeless people in emergency housing has been reduced by 70%. The number of young offenders has gone down and the rate of re-offending youth has fallen by twenty percent between 1997 and 2001. (Social Exclusion Unit 2004).

It is important to note that community infrastructure has been a key player in achieving these improvements at the neighbourhood level. The following are a few examples of the numerous successful initiatives in the U.K.

Crime Prevention

Headstart - Ex-offenders are, statistically, highly likely to re-offend – some 58 percent of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of release. The most effective measure to prevent re-offending is finding and keeping a job. The Headstart project, based in Thorncross Young Offenders Institute, provides skills training and work experience, and tries to find jobs for its offenders prior to and on release. Juvenile and young offenders are sent to college, on training places and into work once eligible. There are also mentors to help them keep the job. In Headstart's first year, 41 per cent of participants were in employment, education or on training placements on release. No program evaluation was available.

Housing and Physical Environment

Mixed housing in Islington - In Islington, two housing associations and a private developer have created a mixed income, mixed tenure community on a brownfield site. Although the development is at 157 dwellings per hectare, 23 of the 67 homes are houses with gardens, and the secure communal space includes a toddlers' playground. Half the homes are at affordable rents or for shared ownership, and the 31 homes for private sale were all sold off plan before completion. This investment in community infrastructure developed by and for the communities targeted by the NRU has already had significant positive impacts in the U.K. in terms of neighbourhood revitalization.

In looking ahead to the second stage of the inclusion agenda, U.K. officials note that to sustain the progress made and to benefit more people who are multiply disadvantaged, innovation in service design and delivery is necessary. They identify a client-centred approach that can address the multiple needs of people through a single access point as critical in designing flexible services that meet local needs. Closer work with voluntary and community groups will be needed to deliver flexible services. (Social Exclusion Unit 2004)

Canada

Numerous examples of effective community infrastructure can also be found in Canada. A few examples follow.

Meeting Basic Needs

The Toronto Food Policy Council is a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health. This multi-stakeholder group of citizens has established innovative projects including Field to Table, which seeks to create bridges between low-income households' need for fresh produce and local farmers who have high-quality vegetables to sell. Since 1992, Field to Table has provided a distribution service that makes affordable fresh fruits, vegetables and eggs available to people where they live. Field to Table also runs a pre-order business for fresh produce targeted specifically to school food programs, buying groups and community markets (Torjman and Leviten-Reid 2003).

Promoting Inclusion

The City of Montreal has supported the development of 22 cross-sectoral joint-action committees in various boroughs. These committees provide input to the City and other agencies, such as Centraide Montreal, about local concerns and undertake specific projects to address these issues. Projects cover all aspects of local social development included in the urban environment, socioeconomic conditions and community life. While the composition of these committees varies by neighbourhood, they generally bring together individual citizens, community organizations, the private sector and public officials (Torjman and Leviten-Reid 2003).

Expected Outcomes from Community Infrastructure Investment

Investment in community infrastructure will have multiple benefits to neighbourhoods and to the nature of daily life in the city. This is particularly true for children, seniors and some people with disabilities for whom the neighbourhood is usually their main point of reference. The range of facilities, programs and social networks that comprise community infrastructure provide the channels for enhancing civic participation in groups such as school councils, residents' associations, amateur sports associations, service clubs and local voluntary associations. Community infrastructure also fosters social inclusion through activities including neighbourhood-based recreation and cultural activities. Both of these goals are critical if Toronto is to embrace and fully integrate immigrants and refugees and if host communities are to live and work respectfully with newcomers.

The foundation community services (publicly-funded schools, libraries and community/neighbourhood centres) provide a community anchor or focal point that anticipates, monitors and responds to community needs over time including changing economic, social and cultural realities. Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre's experience is a good illustration. Over the decades as the demographics changed in the catchment area, DPNC developed additional language capacity to deliver service, expanded services as opportunities became available and

opened a second location when dedicated community space became available. In response to the needs of immigrants without status who increasingly came to the medical clinic, DPNC developed specialized skills and is advocating, with other groups in a coalition, to resolve this untenable situation for people living without formal status in Canada. Effective organizations with a specific ethno-specific focus, such as Tropicana (TCS), have also adapted successfully to meet the changing demographics in the community. Strong leadership at the board and staff level as well as organizational agility made it possible for TCS to successfully broaden its mission/mandate in 1997 to serve all youth and provide settlement services to all newcomers in the area.

At the same time, community infrastructure can help to meet basic needs while engaging volunteers and providing informal learning opportunities. Many youth and new immigrants embrace volunteer opportunities in order to gain workplace experience in Canada. The TCS tutoring program is virtually run by 300 volunteers who each commit to give 60 hours of their time each school year. As a strategy to build community capacity among newcomer communities who may have limited experience with the Canadian electoral system, FSA's community advisory councils have held all-candidates' meetings in immigrant communities.

Local businesses and community economic development initiatives provide jobs and income-producing opportunities for local residents as well as convenient shopping that contributes to vibrant pedestrian life and a sense of community in many neighbourhoods. These opportunities for "eyes on the street" also foster a greater sense of neighbourhood safety.

The expected outcomes from investment in community infrastructure are closely related to how the foundation is laid and what is invested. In other words, outcomes depend heavily on what the inputs are. The contrast of the U.K. experience and the U.S. experience appears to be instructive. The British government's "New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal" with its National Strategy Action Plan containing specific, medium and long-term goals to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country over 20 years is impressive and wide-reaching. It also complements other initiatives with regard to income security and affordable housing. The Blair government has invested substantial funds to help achieve its goal that no child lives in poverty by 2020. This approach also included explicit roles for local government, the non-governmental sector and the community which presumably includes informal social networks as well as individuals.

In contrast, the U.S. Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities intended to revitalize the poorest neighbourhoods focused on tax strategies to business and achieved varying results with regard to improved employment in those zones. The EZ/EC did not have a clear mechanism to involve communities nor does not appear to have contributed to the development of sustainable community infrastructure. There also does not appear to be any links between the EZ/EC programs and the Community Development Block Grants.

An important lesson from both these examples is that initial planning requires explicit goals, sufficient resources and a sustained commitment to take the time necessary to achieve strengthened neighbourhoods. Building on the informal and formal assets of the community is also a key element of strategies to strengthen neighbourhoods.

SECTION 5: Factors that Make Community Infrastructure Effective

- **The clusters of community infrastructure are most effective when there is a resilient social safety net, situated in inclusive social policies that provide the basic necessities (such as food and emergency shelter).** Unfortunately, in the current context, the services, facilities and networks of social support that comprise community infrastructure are increasingly expected to make up the gap created by the erosion or absence of social policies such as an adequate income security system and a vibrant program of social and affordable housing. Community infrastructure optimally works with and complements dynamic social policies rather than replaces them. It is important to note that community infrastructure continues to be essential to strengthen neighbourhoods even when inclusive social policies are in place. In this scenario, community infrastructure organizations would be in a position to emphasize their preventive, asset-building and civic engagement strategies within their work, thereby enhancing the capacity of the community to determine its own fate. (Author. case study interviews with DPNC, TCS)
- **The challenge of securing sufficient, predictable and flexible funding is central to the effectiveness of community infrastructure.** In the literature and in the case studies, the need for funding that works to enable community infrastructure to meet community needs is paramount. Funding needs to be sufficient, particularly to enable the sector to attract and retain talented and skilled staff. Funding also needs to cover both capital and operational needs. For new and emerging communities as well as for under-served communities, there need to be capital funds that will support the establishment and sustaining of the community foundation services. Neighbourhoods need libraries, community/neighbourhood centres and schools – the community anchors - that provide the holistic view of the community and are responsive to community needs. Funding also needs to be flexible enough to enable community infrastructure to prevent or respond to emerging needs in the neighbourhood. The other clusters of services and networks also require financial support in order to leverage the strength of other community assets including volunteers, students and donations in-kind from local businesses, service clubs and individuals. Senior governments will need to work closely with municipal governments, foundations, the United Way and individuals to ensure that these necessary financial resources are available to achieve effective community infrastructure. (Howarth 2003, Toronto Community & Neighbourhood Services 2003)

Ultimately, everyone has a stake in community infrastructure and can contribute by supporting public expenditures and through donations of time, money and services in kind. At the operational level, the responsibilities for community infrastructure have traditionally been shared between federal, provincial and municipal governments and the non-governmental/community sector, as well as the United Way and foundations and, to a lesser extent, some private sector actors. Each participant in this process has etched out a pattern of involvement that differs from the others in terms of responsibilities, commitment and direct involvement with the citizens of each neighbourhood. In recent years, as governments have devolved responsibilities for some services to individuals, users are increasingly expected to pay for the cost of services. This trend, particularly in child care and recreation, makes accessibility a growing concern.

- Effective community infrastructure requires suitable, secure physical plant and outdoor space in neighbourhoods across the city to foster the development of inclusive communities.** As the Task Force on Access to Space reported, the clusters of activities and services that help to define Toronto’s vibrant neighbourhoods are in jeopardy as traditional meeting places in schools, libraries and other public buildings become unaffordable. The strong tradition of volunteer-led community initiatives like Scouts and Girl Guide activities, after-school homework clubs, and recreation programs for youth and seniors is being undermined by the lack of accessible, affordable community space. Two factors, the budget pressures on school boards as a result of the provincial education funding formula and the fiscal pressures on the City of Toronto, have resulted in increased fees for community use of public spaces and the closing of some spaces for community use after school. A 2002 joint City of Toronto and United Way survey of community use of public facilities indicated that community use of schools had declined by 43 percent since 2000 and community use of city-owned buildings declined by 15 percent during the same period. In addition, 69 percent of agencies using school space and 41 percent of agencies using city space have experienced an increase in costs. While commercial office space may be suitable for some programs, the cost is usually far beyond the resources of even the better-funded community infrastructure organizations. (Di Emanuele, Evans & Levy 2002). Tropicana Community Services has experienced this problem as it has had to move its summer camp each year for the past three years because of the lack of affordable and suitable space.
- Effective, sustained and explicit involvement of the community (groups and individuals) is needed at all levels of community infrastructure organizations.** A formal approach of structuring partnerships has been shown to be effective. This participatory approach is evident in the Neighbourhood Renewal Program in the U.K. In the long run, effective community infrastructure needs to build on the informal and formal social networks in order to achieve the “buy in” of all sectors of the community. The Regent Park Revitalization Plan with its Residents’ Council that is involved in decision-making and its twelve-year time frame provides an impressive model centred around building a healthy community through innovative housing redevelopment and inclusive community infrastructure.
- Effective community infrastructure has the capacity to document and assess its successes and shortcomings.** Community infrastructure organizations need to contribute to the design of the evaluation measures to ensure that the information is beneficial in program planning as well as for external purposes. There also needs to be a reasonable balance between the emphasis on data collection and the resources that are required to accomplish the task.

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